9/25/95

Dear Jan,

Enclosed are the proceedings of the State Historic Resources Commission on Wilsonia - General Grant National Park (Cabin community). I thought you & Dick would be interested.

Oakay —

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WHDT

Wilsonia Historic District Trust
387 Camino Sobrante, Orinda, CA 94563

August 12, 1995

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The Board Of Directors of The Wilsonia Historic District Trust Announces With Great Pleasure The Unanimous Vote Of The State Historic Resources Commission Approving Our Listing As A Historic District

Dear Friends:

This letter records the wonderful events of August 11, 1995. We will send you another letter in about three months outlining in detail what this all means. There is much good news to tell!

My wife and I rose early and were in our car driving to Sacramento by about 6:30am. We drove across the old bridge into downtown Sacramento at about 8 o'clock and soon parked in a parking garage only a block and a half from the Capitol building. It was a beautiful day with a clear blue sky.

We walked to the Capitol and soon found Senate Meeting Room 112, a comfortably large, beautifully restored room, with theater-style seats in fifteen or so straight rows facing a raised half-circular desk behind which would sit, by 9am, the State Historical Resources Commission.

Fran Preston was there already and the three of us entered and sat down in the empty room. Within a few minutes other Wilsonia people started arriving, Gus Collin and two of his three brothers, Lois Tripp (the wife of Ferns' son, Judd), Jim Sorensen, Violet and Wendell Deeter, plus Christy J. McAvoy and Andrea Humberger from the Historic Resources Group - all in all twelve of us.

Acting Commission Chairman, David G. Cameron (a lawyer and historian from Santa Monica), called the meeting to order at about 9:05am, a few moments late because of a non-operating public address system. He ran the meeting smoothly and rather expeditiously but the agenda handed out at the door indicated that we would likely not be discussed until sometime around 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

To set the stage for you, the following (starting on the left and moving to the right) were the people sitting behind the large raised desk:

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- Sandra J. Elder, the Assistant Executive Secretary of the State Historic Resources Commission and the compiler of the *California Historical Landmarks* publication, now in its 11th printing. She arrived early and seemed to be the person most concerned with making sure that everything was "ready to go" at the appointed time.

- Herbert H. Brin, listed as an *Ethnic Historian*, from Altadena. He was perhaps the oldest person on the panel but he took a lively and active interest in the proceedings. He is the author of five books of poetry and two books on the German Holocaust.

- Jane Foster Carter, listed as a *Public Member*, from the small town of Colusa. She is a long-time preservationist with strong ties to Stanford University.

- Dr. Robert L. Hoover, listed as a *Historic Archaeologist*, from San Luis Obispo. Professor Hoover is head of the Department of Anthropology at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. His Ph.D. is from the University of California, Berkeley.

- Sue F. Schechter, listed as a *Public Member*, from La Canada-Flintridge. She has a bachelor's degree in education and history from Occidental College. For many years she was the Executive Director of the Pasadena Historical Society and Museum.

- Cherilyn Widell, the Executive Secretary of the State Historic Resources Commission and California's State Historic Preservation Officer. She is a former Smithsonian Fellow and Fulbright Scholar to Japan.

- David G. Cameron - the acting Chairman. He is a member of Preservation Action, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Society of Architectural Historians, California Council for the Promotion of History, and the Orange Empire Railway Museum. He truly did an excellent job of running the meeting.

- John D. Henderson, F.A.I.A., listed as an *Architect* from San Diego. He is a member of the Association for Preservation Technology, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the San Diego Historical Society. At the noon break he gave me some good ideas about how to move forward.

- a new member, I did not record his name and no biographical material was handed out about him. He was sworn in at the beginning of the meeting by Secretary Murphy of the State Resources Agency.

- Maryln Bourne Lortie, listed as a *Historian II* as one of the Office of Historic Preservation staff. She is a doctoral candidate in American History at the University of California, Berkeley. She wrote the excellent description of Wilsonia that was given to the Commissioners and handed out to all meeting attendees. We owe her **Many Thanks** for a job well done.

- Cynthia Howse, listed as a *Historian II* as one of the Office of Historic Preservation staff. She has a A.B. in Art History from the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and she has worked for many years on restoration projects and as a preservation planner.

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Thus, we faced a rather well dressed, somewhat formal appearing group of eleven people, in addition to two clerks seated on the right at a separate table and another staff person seated in the audience on the left.

After the meeting was called to order, we all rose to Pledge Allegiance. In the restored turn-of-the century grandeur of Senate Meeting Room 112, this was a much more moving experience than normal. Looking at the eleven people seated behind the raised desk in front of me, I knew this was not going to be just another day.

Minutes of two earlier meetings were approved with little discussion and then the new member was sworn in. Various reports were read, the Executive Secretary made her report to the Commission and around ten o'clock a guest speaker spoke for about half an hour.

We were listed on the "Consent Calendar" portion of the agenda - which meant approval without discussion - but one person had sent in (late) a letter in opposition. I have not seen the letter but Christy McAvoy said it was a very mild letter from someone saying they were a 79 year old Wilsonia cabin owner and that they didn't understand what this was all about and didn't want anything changed. Whenever there is <u>any</u> opposition, the subject must be opened to public discussion, so at the last minute we were moved from the consent calendar and scheduled "for discussion."

At a 10:30am break in the meeting, the Wilsonia team asked me to serve as its speaker (along with Christy McAvoy of the Historic Resources Group). Thus, for the next hour or so I listened to the proceedings while also writing down some *prepared remarks*.

The meeting moved forward more rapidly than expected. The consent calendar, listed in the published agenda as to occur at around 2pm was completed by 11:40 and Dave Cameron pushed forward quickly to the "for discussion" items: The Gladstone Mine Historic District was renamed "Gladstone Houses" and - very suddenly - at 11:52am, Christy McAvoy and I walked forward and sat down at a desk with two microphones facing the **Historic Resources Commission of the State of California**.

As we were the first speakers from the public, Chairman Cameron made a few introductory comments and then turned the meeting over to us. All of our work starting from that early meeting in our Clubhouse in July of 1991 was now to bear or not to bear fruit. This was, without a shred of doubt, very much *IT*.

Christy spoke first and quickly - for perhaps only one or two minutes. She stressed the unique "joy"that seems to be at the core of Wilsonia. Then it was my turn.

I looked up at the panel, seated quietly in a truly beautiful room. I did not know what they were thinking - but I did know that the staff had recommended approval and that the National Park Service had not opposed our application but had, to our great delight, decided to remain officially *neutral*. The following were my remarks:

"My name is James M. Spitze and I am the President of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust and am a long standing member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

As a 4th generation Californian, I have a deep and abiding interest in the history of our

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state. As Wilsonia goes, my wife and I are "Johnny come latelies." We purchased our cabin in 1971 while many of my friends here today are 2nd and 3rd generation owners with ownership going back to the early years of this century. [At this point I asked all of the Wilsonia people in the audience to raise their hands].

We see our small community located at an elevation of almost seven thousand feet in the Sierra Nevada mountains, as a unique cultural artifact - a thriving, vigorous, multi-generational, multi-ethnic community with over seven decades of continuous, on-going community activities - of pancake breakfasts, of fund raising auctions, of square dances and so forth.

We also see ourselves as historic, not only for the 50+ year age of the great majority of our cabins but also because of our deep involvement, now almost fifty years ago, in the early steps that ultimately led to the formation of the great national park, Kings Canyon National Park, which we adjoin. [At this point, I recall looking at the Commissioners and seeing smiles of support and interest. A dream was soon to be a reality.]

To pass on to our children and our children's children our rich historic and cultural legacy, we seek classification as an HISTORIC DISTRICT.

Although our neighbor, the National Park Service, is officially neutral on this matter, I would like to read a brief yet relevant letter from Dr. William Tweed, the National Park Service historian for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. [and then I read the following two paragraphs]:

> "Although some Wilsonia cabin owners apparently still harbor concerns that the National Park Service secretly intends to abolish Wilsonia, this is not our goal. As our land protection plan clearly states, our target is to preserve Wilsonia in private ownership as a low-density residential community. Since these also seem to be the aim of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, our interests seem to be substantially compatible.
>
> I will be happy to meet with you at your convenience to discuss how the National Park Service can support your goal of creating a Wilsonia Historic District."

[I then displayed the actual letter and mentioned that I had, since the letter, talked to and met with Dr. Tweed several times. I then resumed the reading of my prepared remarks.]

I would like to thank Maryln Bourne Lortie for her excellent description of Wilsonia in the Property Summary Information Document. In passing, I would like to make it clear that Wilsonia is not a Forest Service Tract with all of the related complications of leased land. Rather, all of us own our cabins <u>and</u> the land they stand on as normal private property.

In closing, on behalf of the entire membership of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, I wish to concur with your staff's recommendation for listing Wilsonia at the <u>local</u> level of significance. Although some of my honorable friends see Wilsonia as of State, National, International or even <u>Interplanetary</u> significance, with all due modesty, I think listing at the <u>local</u> level of significance is entirely appropriate."

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Some Words About The Future

As mentioned earlier, we will send to you in about three months a clear statement of what this all means. The reason we will take three months to do this are two fold.

- First, it will take a bit of work on the part of our friends at Historic Resources Group to prepare such a document.

- Second, we want to be absolutely sure that every "T" is crossed and "I" dotted at the federal level before really moving forward. Presently, the State Historic Preservation Office has approved our listing. Although this, according to the Historic Resources Group, almost automatically carries with it listing in the National Register of Historic Places, we don't want to start taking any formal actions until this actually happens and we are officially informed.

Assuming all moves forward as expected, the following are some things you will likely be hearing more about:

#1 The State of California's Mills Act provides, under certain circumstances, for an up to 40% reduction in property taxes for contributing Historic Properties. This requires specific application by the relevant property owner and property-by-property approval by the relevant county government - Tulare County in our case.

#2 There is a special State of California "Historic Buildings Building Code" that we need to learn more about. Some Wilsonia property owners may want to consider the restoration or modification of their cabins in keeping with this alternative building code instead of the more restrictive one we have been following until now.

#3 The National Park Service owns five Wilsonia cabins designated as "contributing" historic structures. We may want to work with the NPS to lease these structures from them, under the auspices of the Wilsonia District Trust, and then rent them out to various people who would, in turn, restore them in return for a very nominal rent.

#4 The National Park Service has mentioned to us that whereas they can not provide office or living space to The Church of the Sequoias (or any similar organization) on specially favorable terms, we can. They have gone on to mention that they might possibly be able to lease us one of their cabins which we, in turn, could rent to The Church of the Sequoias - which has already stated a desire to find a "home" in Wilsonia. Clearly, this is something we need to explore carefully.

#5 Only slightly more than 2/3rds of our cabins are "contributing" which is the bare minimum required for Historic District listing. Many of our younger cabins will become "contributing" as they grow older but we will need to continuously watch our "contributing" percentage to prevent the loss of Historic District listing. This will take some work on the part of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust and on the part of Wilsonia Village Inc. (our long-standing homeowners association).

It is important to understand that listing is not a one-time affair. We must work to retain what we have won. An outside body could, at any time, challenge our listing and we must be prepared to prove that property changes since the original listing have not adversely impacted our historic nature. The process we will follow in doing this is sometimes called "self-policing" and it is something we will need to work carefully on.

#6 The Wilsonia Historic District Trust is a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization to which individuals may make tax-deductible contributions. To preserve our status, now that we have (we believe) achieved our initial objective, we must offer an ongoing educational program - regarding the cultural and historic legacy of "Our Wilsonia." We have already mentioned to the NPS the idea of jointly sponsored educational lectures and courses - perhaps using The Wilsonia Clubhouse as the "schoolroom." This again is something we need to work more on.

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[With friendly laughter from the panel and from the audience, I thus concluded my remarks.]

Commissioner Brin asked the only question - if the name "Wilsonia" had anything to do with President Woodrow Wilson and I responded in the affirmative telling briefly about the now long lost oil painting of the President that once stood at Wilsonia's entrance.

Chairman Cameron asked if there were any other questions and, there being none, he then entertained a motion to list Wilsonia as a *Historic District.* The motion was made and seconded and the panel then voted unanimously in our favor.

It was 12 noon. Only eight minutes had passed. The Chairman announced the lunch break and said the meeting would resume promptly at 1 o'clock - but we did not need to come back. What we came for had been accomplished. Fran Preston took a cab to the airport to fly home and the rest of us went to a nearby restaurant to celebrate.

Unless there is a very unlikely slip, we will receive official notification of our addition to the National Register of Historic Places in three months or less. All "of record" Wilsonia cabin owners will receive their own personal notification - from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

May God bless you all - and particularly Fern Tripp, Fran Preston, Maxine Preston (who our prayers are most certainly with), and the magnificent Historic Resources Group team of Christy McAvoy and Andrea Humberger.

Cordially,

James M. Spitze
President

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